

Open Water by Kamije Celeek

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Summary: Piracy AU: El was the first mate of the Eleanora, a ship captained by her father and lauded as one of the greatest pirate vessels of all time. She thought she knew everything about who she was, but when a group of four boys joins the ship's crew, she begins to learn. And begins to plot vengeance...

Open Water

The ocean.

Since humans first discovered the waves, they have been fascinated by the sheer majesty of its depth... and those depths also inspired terror of the unknown, of drowning trying to know the truth of the oceans. But the ocean has also been a source of wealth through fishing and—more importantly—trade. Once humanity figured out how to build ships that could make their way through the treacherous waters that made up most of the Earth's surface, they sought two things: money and expanding their territories. Some sought knowledge as well, but they were few and far between. Many societies widened their sphere of influence through conquests of other, smaller and weaker societies.

Phoenicia. Egypt. Persia. Athens. Carthage. Rome.

All great empires of the past who had used the waters as their playground, to kick over the (sand)castles of their smaller neighbors and even places far away. They'd conquered vast swathes of territory, taking over more and more until they inevitably fell to revolution and chaos. It was the fate of every empire, because no system could last forever. These empires had fallen long ago, all because the world changed and they failed to change with it, being shattered in the process. Not one of them had lasted longer than a few centuries and now were stories, cautionary tales for the empires of today.

Spain. France. Britain. Portugal.

These new empires spread the globe, controlling lands on nearly every continent. Powerful because of their military might. Swift in their conquests. Strong in every way, except perhaps in the way they treated the conquered peoples. Unlike the empires of the past, who'd incorporated those they conquered as citizens, these new empires treat their new additions as places to only extract wealth, to gain free labor, to spread their influence and wipe out the old ways of the natives. Through tricks and slavery, through disease and outright bloodshed, they controlled the world, it seemed. But not all their own people.

Because as long as there have been ships plying the waves for trade and conquest, there have been pirates. Bandits of the sea who plunder and pillage other crafts and send vessels to the bottom. Raiders who don't differentiate between their homelands and enemies of said homelands. Oddly democratic men—and occasionally women—who have more equality on their ships than they do back home. Being a pirate is more fair than earning an honest living onboard a ship, everyone sharing equally in the bounty when commanders on official ships took most of the money for themselves. Many are feared throughout the known world and tales are spun about their treatment of those they capture that don't come back. And the pirates welcome those tales, as they strike fear into the hearts of those who would otherwise end their reigns over the seas.

Our story is about one such group of pirates. Or rather, the captain of one such ship. James 'Jim' Hopper, captain of the *Eleanora*. A fine vessel, named for his fifteen-year-old daughter who traveled with him—Jane Eleanor Hopper. He'd been a pirate since the war with Spain, a war where he'd been hired as a privateer and taken on piracy following the war's end. And it was shortly after that when his wife Theresa died under mysterious, leaving Hopper the sole caretaker of his then four-year-old daughter. He couldn't leave her on land so she was brought onboard the vessel, stashed in the hold during raids so she wouldn't be taken until she became old enough to work with the cabin boys.

And at the age of fifteen, having spent most of her life on the water, El (as Captain Hopper's daughter preferred to be called) had more experience sailing than most of the men that joined the ship. They protested her presence until they realized that she was the captain's right hand, his first mate and the first person he delegated to. She knew *Eleanora* better than anyone else and it showed when the ship was boarded, her being their best person when it came to ambush tactics. When the intruders saw her leap out, swords flashing, wild curls flying, they were terrified by the wild woman and it often played right into some kind of trap, earning her the nickname 'Wild Princess of *Eleanora*'.

But this story isn't about El and her father's early life, though that surely plays a factor. No, rather our tale is about four boys who

joined *Eleanora* and her crew. It's a saga of corruption, betrayal, fear, and pride. A picture of anger and violence. Of vengeance and tragedy on the waves. And yet it's also an account of friendship, of learning to move forward, and of breaking down barriers that separate humans. It's an anecdote of brothers and of fathers and daughters. And it's an epic of finding true love on the high seas when the world is stacked against a person.

And our story truly begins in a tiny coastal village called Hawkins.